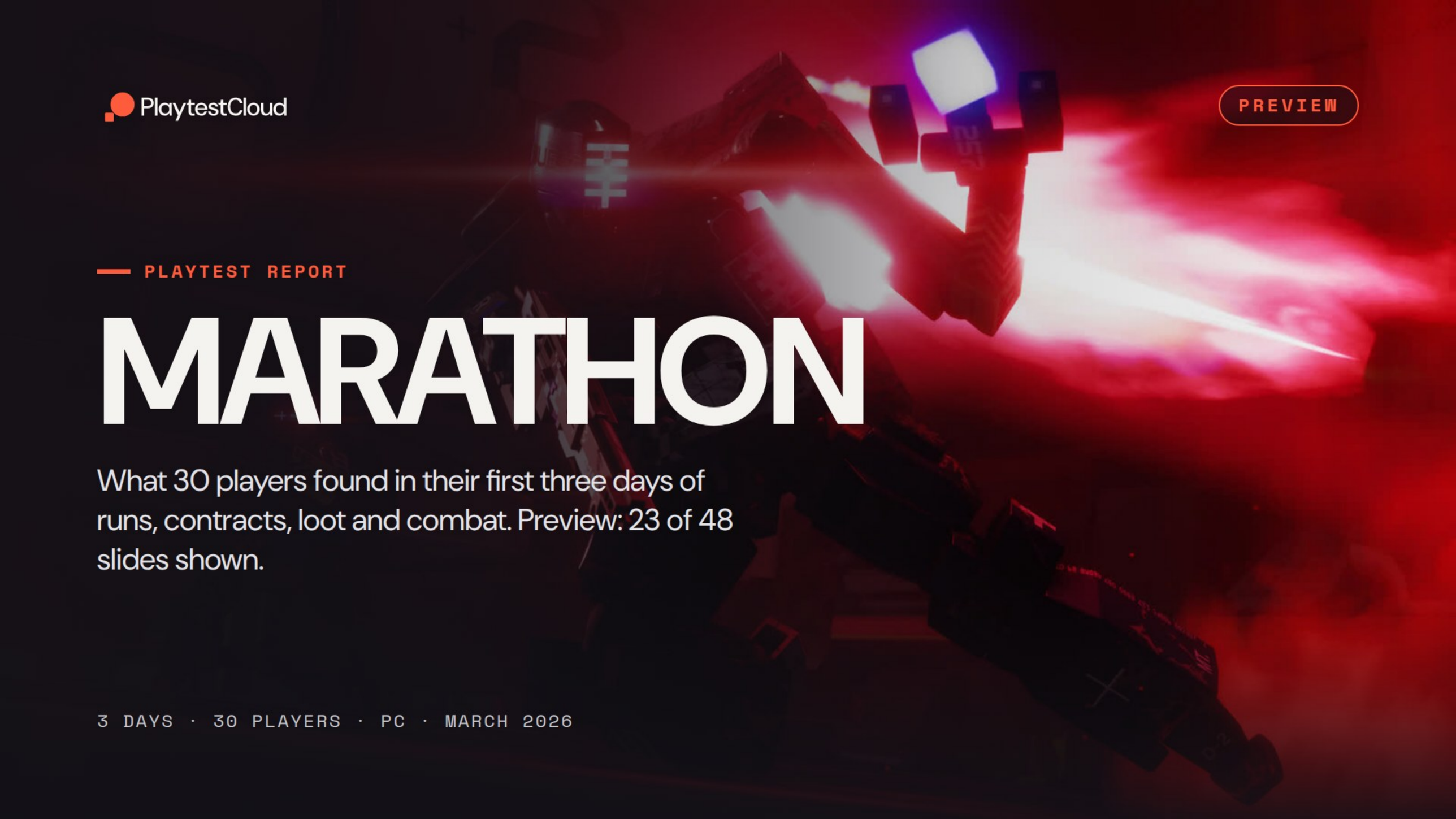


PlaytestCloud

PREVIEW

PLAYTEST REPORT

# MARATHON

What 30 players found in their first three days of runs, contracts, loot and combat. Preview: 23 of 48 slides shown.

3 DAYS · 30 PLAYERS · PC · MARCH 2026

CONTENTS

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# Executive summary

**Marathon's combat and world win players over from the first run. The systems around a run stay unclear for too long, and instability chips at trust.**

**01** **Gunplay is the standout, and it holds for all three days**
All 30 agreed shooting gave clear feedback on Day 1; 28 of 30 still said the guns felt good on Day 3.

**02** **Contract objectives are hard to find in the match**
12 players were seen searching for objectives; on Day 2, 11 of 30 disagreed objectives were easy to find.

**03** **Loot value is the biggest knowledge gap on Day 1**
15 of 30 disagreed it was easy to tell what was worth taking. It improves, but 7 still disagreed on Day 3.

**04** **Combat state is hard to read in the moment**
Healing and shields, AI versus runners, and AI threat level all confused players; 8 still named AI enemies on Day 3.

**05** **Instability and comms friction undercut the social loop**
22 of 30 recordings show crashes, disconnects or rubber-banding; 10 players struggled to get voice chat working.

METHOD

# Three 90-minute sessions with 30 new players

## Aim (inferred)

Understand how new players learn Marathon's competitive extraction loop across three days: what they grasp, where they stall, and what keeps them playing.

## Sample

30 PC players in the US, aged 18 to 34, 25 men and 5 women. 29 play 12 or more hours a week. All 30 completed every session and survey.

## Structure

A longitudinal study: three days of 90 minutes each, think-aloud recording, then a survey after every session with ratings and open answers.

Playtest · Videos · First Findings

**30**
players, all 3 days

**3 × 90**
minutes of play each

**2,030**
annotated moments

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

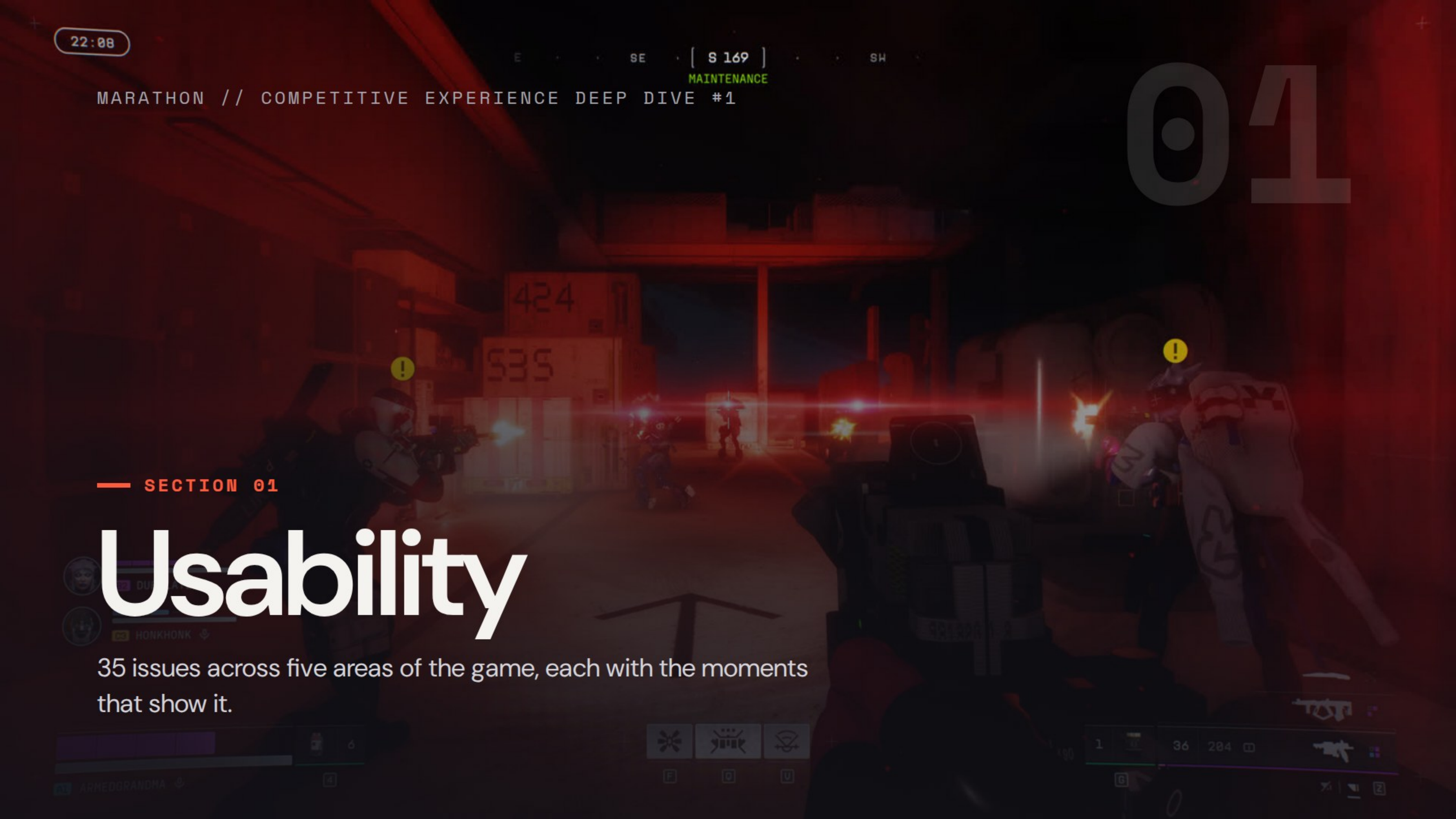
PLAYER EXPERIENCE HIERARCHY

# This study covers learning, enjoying and returning

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Discovery** | Do players find the game and want to try it? | |
| **Appeal** | Does the premise and look draw them in? | |
| **Usability** | Can players understand and use what the game asks of them? | THIS PLAYTEST |
| **Appreciation** | Do they enjoy each part of the game? | THIS PLAYTEST |
| **Engagement** | Do they want to come back, and for how long? | THIS PLAYTEST |

Three days of play let us see first-run friction, how much of it fades with practice, and what players still want after the novelty.

01




SECTION 01

# Usability

35 issues across five areas of the game, each with the moments that show it.

HOW WE PRIORITISE

# We rank each issue by how many players it hit and how badly it hurt their play

**HIGH**

Stops players, or seriously misleads them, on a core task. Seen across many players.

**MEDIUM**

Slows players down or causes errors they recover from, or hits a smaller group hard.

**LOW**

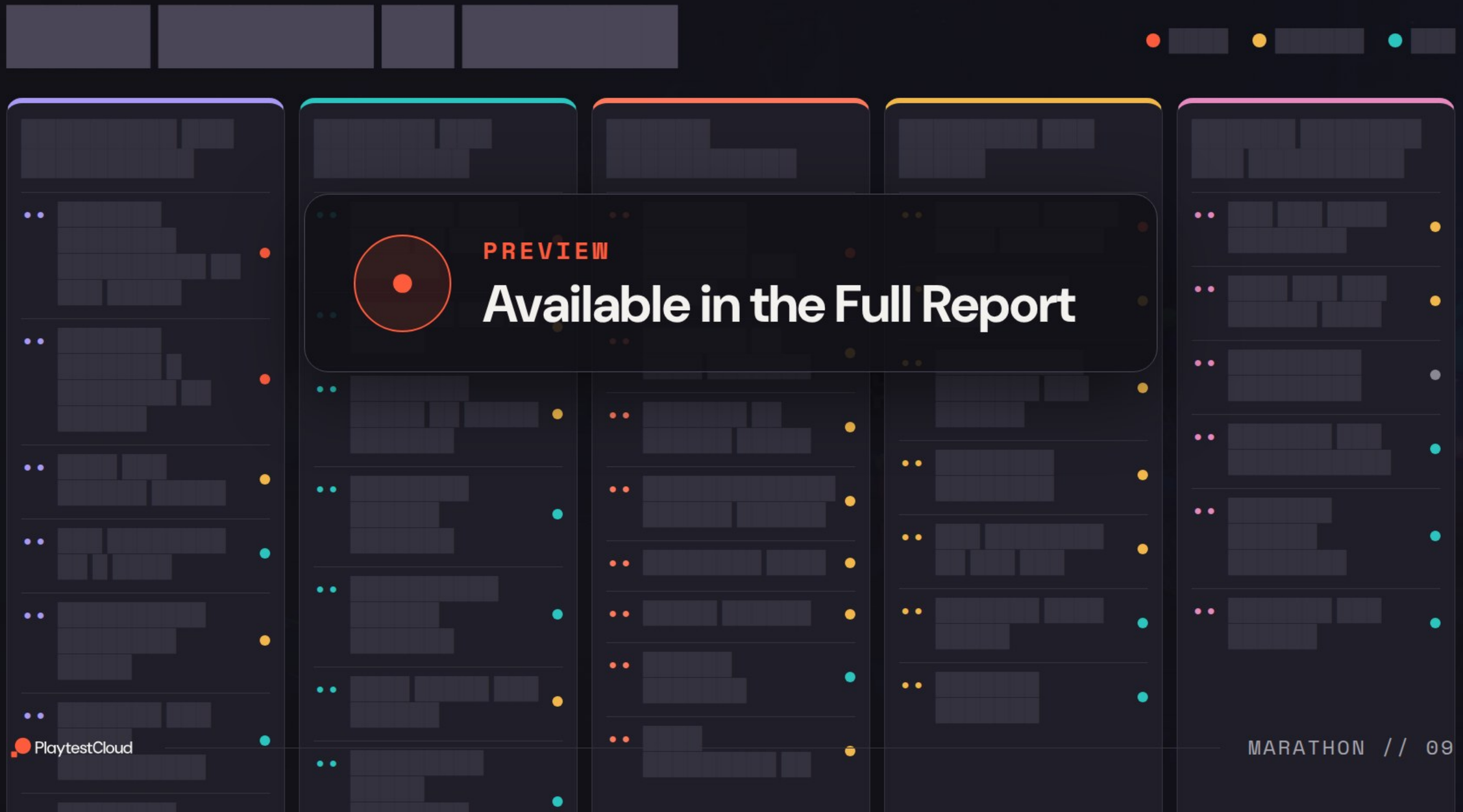
Minor friction or polish. Worth fixing when the area is next touched.

**COMMENT**

An observation worth sharing that isn't a usability issue, such as a technical fault.

Frequency is the number of players (out of 30) whose recordings show the issue. Severity is what it did to their play: stalled, misled, slowed or annoyed.

## ISSUES BY CATEGORY



USABILITY CATEGORY

# Contracts and objectives

7 ISSUES IN THIS CATEGORY

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | Finding contract objectives in the match | HIGH |
| 02 | Knowing whether a contract is active | HIGH |
| 03 | Keys and locked doors | MEDIUM |
| 04 | One contract at a time | LOW |
| 05 | Unfamiliar contract terms | MEDIUM |
| 06 | Finding and using extraction | LOW |
| 07 | Tutorial depth | MEDIUM |

ISSUE 01 · 12 PLAYERS **HIGH**

# The game doesn't show where contract objectives are until players are close

## PROBLEM

Players knew the objective's name but not where it was. Markers often appear only up close, and section names alone don't guide players through vertical, cluttered spaces.

## IMPACT

Runs end with the contract unfinished, so players lose the reward that gives a run its purpose and start to question whether contracts are worth taking on. Taylor hunted a radio tower and a terminal for long stretches; on Day 2, 11 of 30 disagreed objectives were easy to find.

## DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

Make the next step of a contract legible from where the player stands. Levers include marker range, map annotation, audio or diegetic cues, and how early contracts are staged.




CLIP Taylor at 04:31:53 · open in PlaytestCloud

- Taylor 01:25:51
- Aarya 02:02:08
- Zachary A 27:05

ISSUE 02 · 10 PLAYERS HIGH

# The game doesn't make clear whether a contract is active before a run starts

## PROBLEM

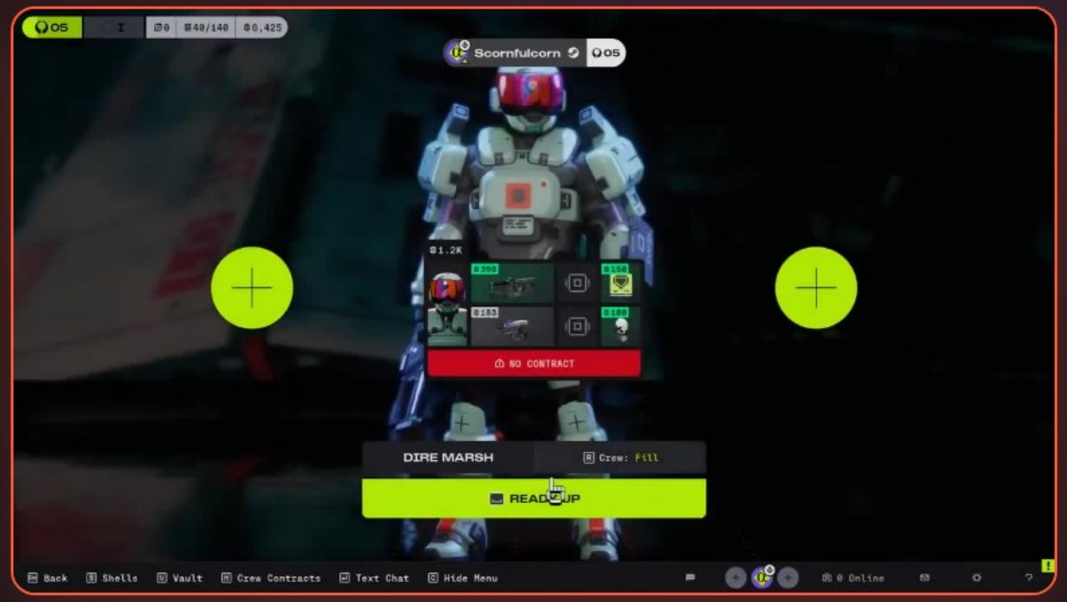
Contracts must be activated in menus, and nothing at Ready Up stops a run without one. Players forget, misclick, or can't tell what state the contract is in.

## IMPACT

A run without an active contract is a run without progress, which wastes a session and teaches players that the meta-game is fiddly. Marc reached Ready Up with "No contract" showing; Wyatt and nani weren't sure theirs were active.

## DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

Make contract state visible and confirmed at the moment players commit to a run. Options range from auto-tracking to a prompt at deploy, to clearer state in the contract screen.




● CLIP Marc at 01:44:16 · open in PlaytestCloud

▶ Wyatt 02:52:34 ▶ nani 36:24

▶ revan 02:24:44

ISSUE 03 · 6 PLAYERS **MEDIUM**

# The game gives no lead on how to find the key a locked door needs

## PROBLEM

Locked doors and boxes give no feedback on how to approach them: which key is needed, where keys come from, or where to start looking. That begins with the tutorial's locked door.

## IMPACT

Locked rooms become dead ends rather than goals, so players stop treating keys as something to pursue and miss whatever sits behind them. Tucker said he didn't know how to get the keys; Jayden and Sebastien hit doors they couldn't open.

## DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

Give players a starting point for the key hunt. Levers include what a locked object tells players, how keys are introduced, and how key sources are signposted in the world and on the map.




CLIP Tucker at 01:28:02 · open in PlaytestCloud

Jayden 04:06:28

Heyward 30:06

Sebastien 36:27

LOW • PLAYERS

MEDIUM • PLAYERS



PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

LOW • PLAYERS

MEDIUM • PLAYERS

USABILITY CATEGORY

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

• ISSUES IN THIS CATEGORY

| | |
|---|---|
| [redacted] | HIGH |
| [redacted] | MEDIUM |
| [redacted] | MEDIUM |
| [redacted] | LOW |
| [redacted] | LOW |
| [redacted] | MEDIUM |
| [redacted] | LOW |

## LOOTING AND INVENTORY

ISSUE •• · •• PLAYERS **HIGH**

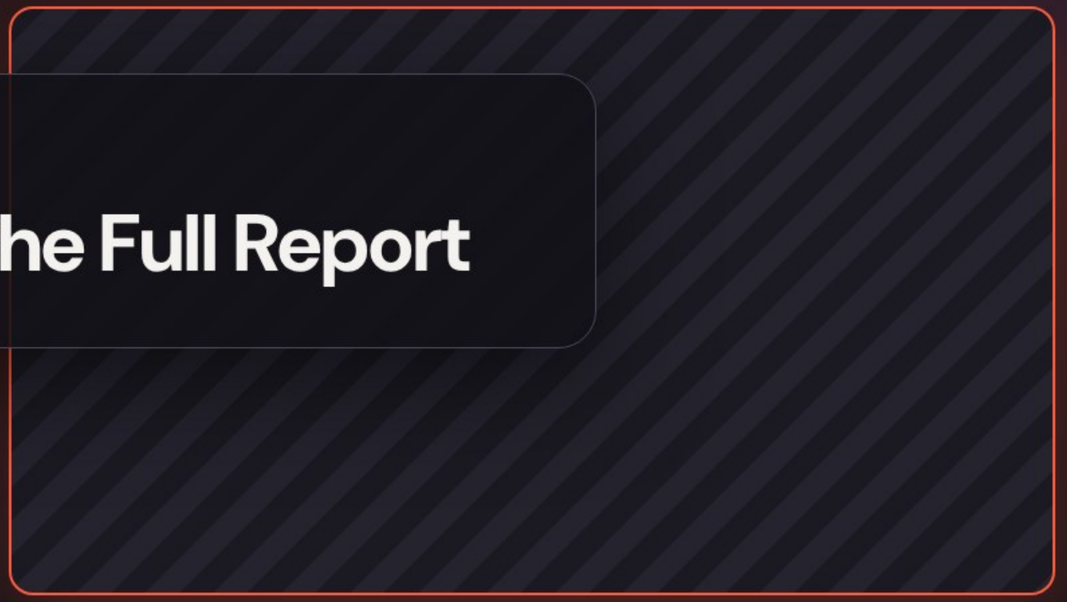
### PROBLEM

### IMPACT

### DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

PREVIEW

**Available in the Full Report**



CLIP [redacted] at ••:•• · open in PlaytestCloud

ISSUE •• · • PLAYERS MEDIUM

PROBLEM

IMPACT

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

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▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

ISSUE •• · • PLAYERS MEDIUM

[redacted]

PROBLEM

[redacted]

IMPACT

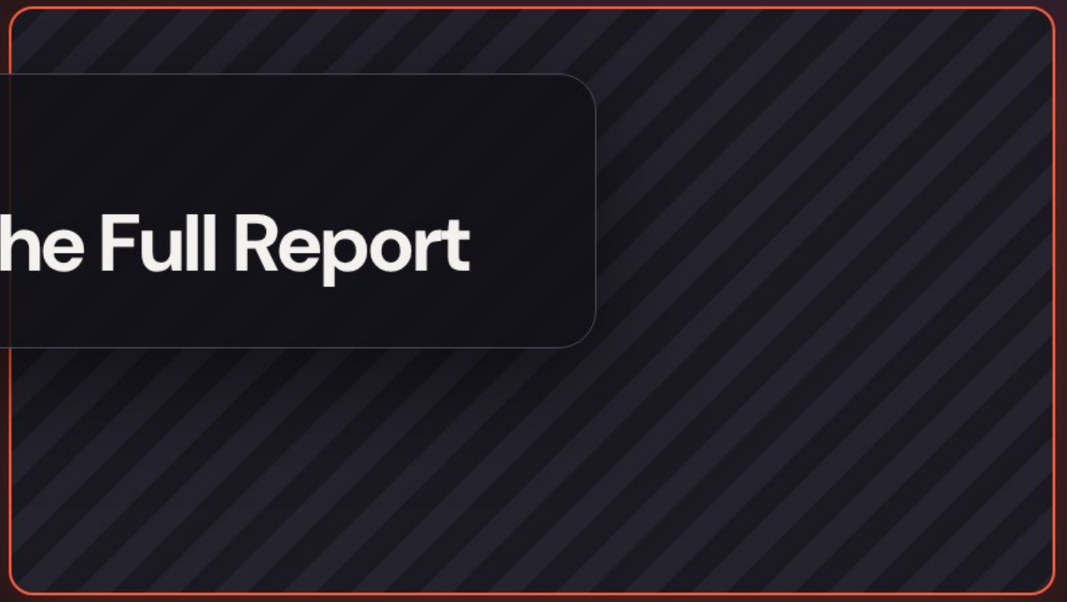
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DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

[redacted]

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report



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▶ [redacted] ••:••:••  ▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

LOW • PLAYERS

LOW • PLAYERS

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

MEDIUM • PLAYERS

LOW • PLAYERS

USABILITY CATEGORY

# Combat readability

| 8 ISSUES IN THIS CATEGORY | | |
|---|---|---|
| 15 | Reading health, shields and heals | HIGH |
| 16 | Telling AI from runners | MEDIUM |
| 17 | Reading AI threat level | MEDIUM |
| 18 | Understanding sudden deaths | MEDIUM |
| 19 | Friendly fire | MEDIUM |
| 20 | Enemy health | MEDIUM |
| 21 | Revive prompts | LOW |
| 22 | What abilities do | MEDIUM |

COMBAT READABILITY

ISSUE 15 · 9 PLAYERS HIGH

# The game doesn't clearly communicate health, shield and healing state in combat

## PROBLEM

Health and shield share a space players find hard to tell apart, and items don't make clear when they're working or needed.

## IMPACT

Healing is a core survival decision. When its state is unclear, players waste items and misjudge whether to fight or retreat, so deaths feel like the game's fault. Garrett said on Day 3 that healing was very confusing; Keith couldn't tell health from shields.

## DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

Make health, shield and item state unmistakable at a glance and under fire. Levers include HUD, audio, item feedback and how the tutorial introduces them.




● CLIP Garrett at 23:29 · open in PlaytestCloud

▶ Garrett 03:12:03 ▶ Keith 52:41

▶ James 24:20

## COMBAT READABILITY

ISSUE •• · • PLAYERS **MEDIUM**

[redacted]

### PROBLEM

[redacted]

### IMPACT

[redacted]

### DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

[redacted]

PREVIEW

**Available in the Full Report**

[redacted]

● CLIP [redacted] at ••:••:•• · open in PlaytestCloud

▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

▶ [redacted] ••:••:••

## COMBAT READABILITY

ISSUE •• · • PLAYERS **MEDIUM**

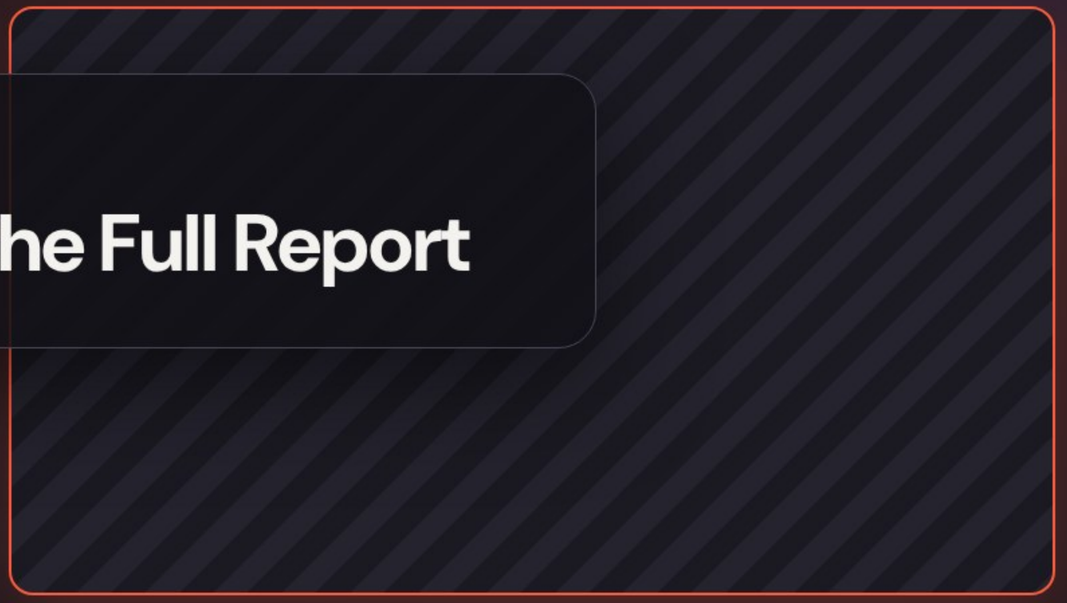
### PROBLEM

### IMPACT

### DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

**PREVIEW**

# Available in the Full Report



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## COMBAT READABILITY

ISSUE •• · •• PLAYERS **MEDIUM**

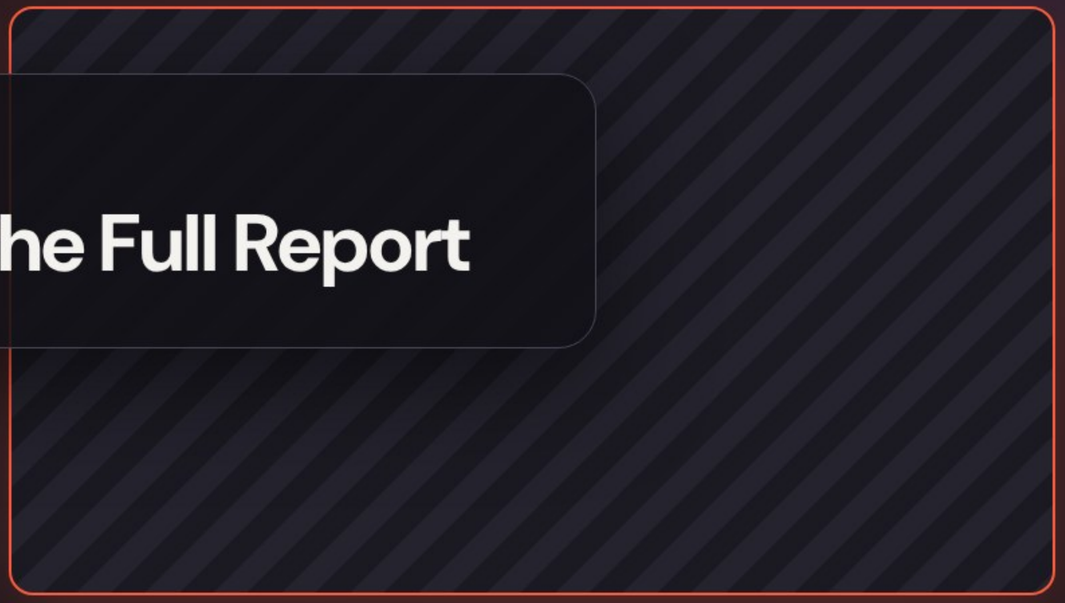
### PROBLEM

### IMPACT

### DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

**PREVIEW**

# Available in the Full Report



CLIP [redacted] at ••:••:•• · open in PlaytestCloud

MEDIUM •• OF •• PLAYERS

MEDIUM •• OF •• PLAYERS

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

LOW • PLAYERS

MEDIUM • PLAYERS

USABILITY CATEGORY

# Controls and comms

7 ISSUES IN THIS CATEGORY

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 23 | Getting voice chat working | HIGH |
| 24 | Rebinding keys | MEDIUM |
| 25 | Controller prompts and inputs | MEDIUM |
| 26 | Throwing grenades | MEDIUM |
| 27 | Own position on the map | MEDIUM |
| 28 | Reading heat state | LOW |
| 29 | Default mapping | LOW |

ISSUE 23 · 10 PLAYERS **HIGH**

# Voice chat is hard to set up and doesn't confirm teammates can hear

## PROBLEM

Push-to-talk and proximity settings are hard to find, labelled unfamiliarly, and give little confirmation that teammates can hear.

## IMPACT

When players can't tell whether they're heard, they stop calling things out and coordination falls apart, weakening the squad play that lifted enjoyment for others in the study. Heyward couldn't find push-to-talk; Lillian didn't know her key; Riley and Demeatrius kept checking.

## DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

Make talking to your squad work first time. Levers include defaults, setup flow, on-screen confirmation and controller support.




● CLIP Heyward at 14:55 · open in PlaytestCloud

▶ Lillian 04:58 ▶ Demeatrius 04:10

▶ Wyatt 36:27

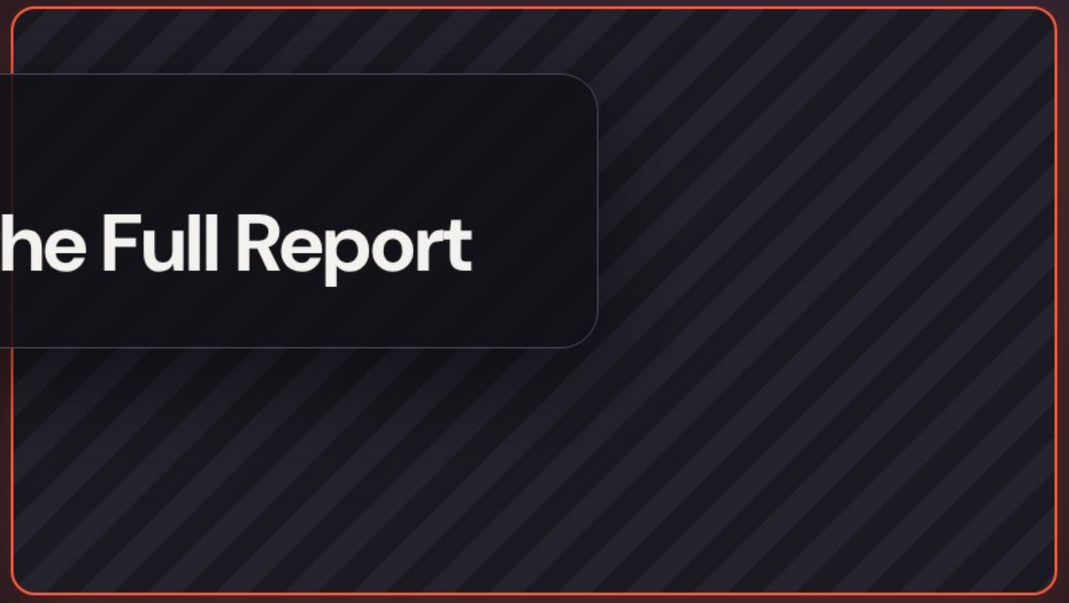
PROBLEM

IMPACT

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report



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ISSUE •• · • PLAYERS MEDIUM

[redacted]

## PROBLEM

[redacted]

## IMPACT

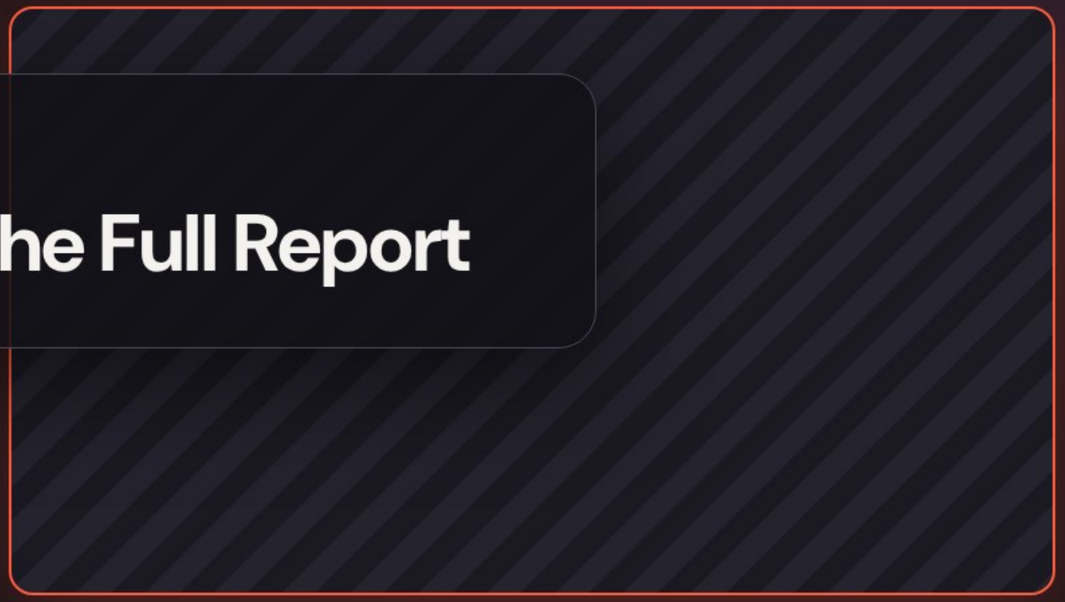
[redacted]

## DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

[redacted]

PREVIEW

**Available in the Full Report**



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[redacted] ••:••:••

[redacted] ••:••

[redacted] ••:••

MEDIUM • PLAYERS

MEDIUM • PLAYERS

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

LOW • PLAYERS

LOW • PLAYERS

USABILITY CATEGORY

• ISSUES IN THIS CATEGORY

MEDIUM

MEDIUM

COMMENT

LOW

LOW

LOW

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

ISSUE ·· · ·· PLAYERS MEDIUM

PROBLEM

IMPACT

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

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ISSUE •• · • PLAYERS MEDIUM

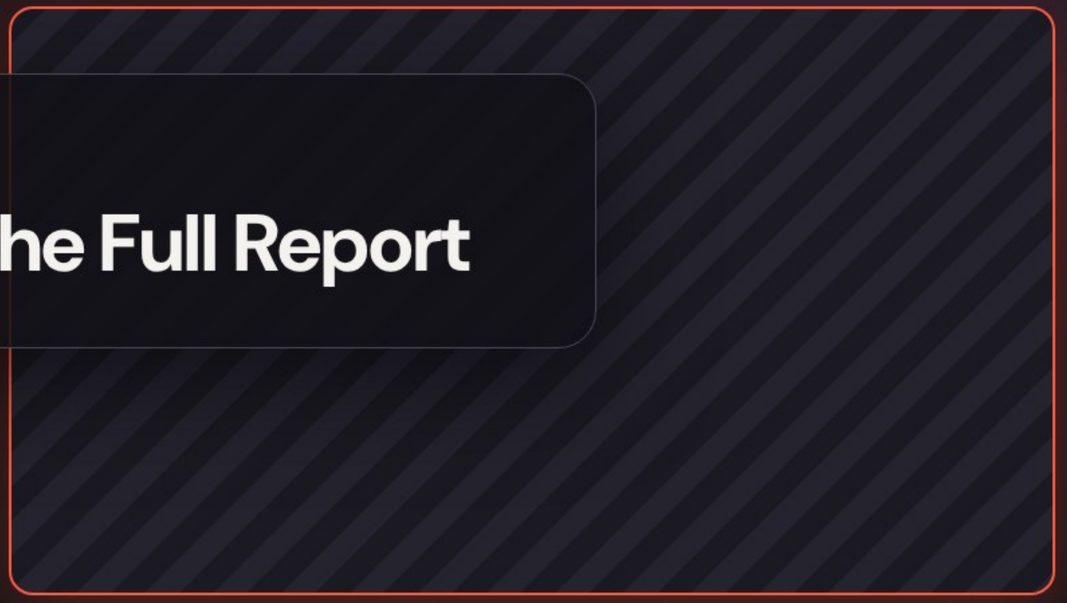
PROBLEM

IMPACT

DIRECTIONS TO EXPLORE

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report



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COMMENT

•• PLAYERS

LOW

• PLAYERS

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

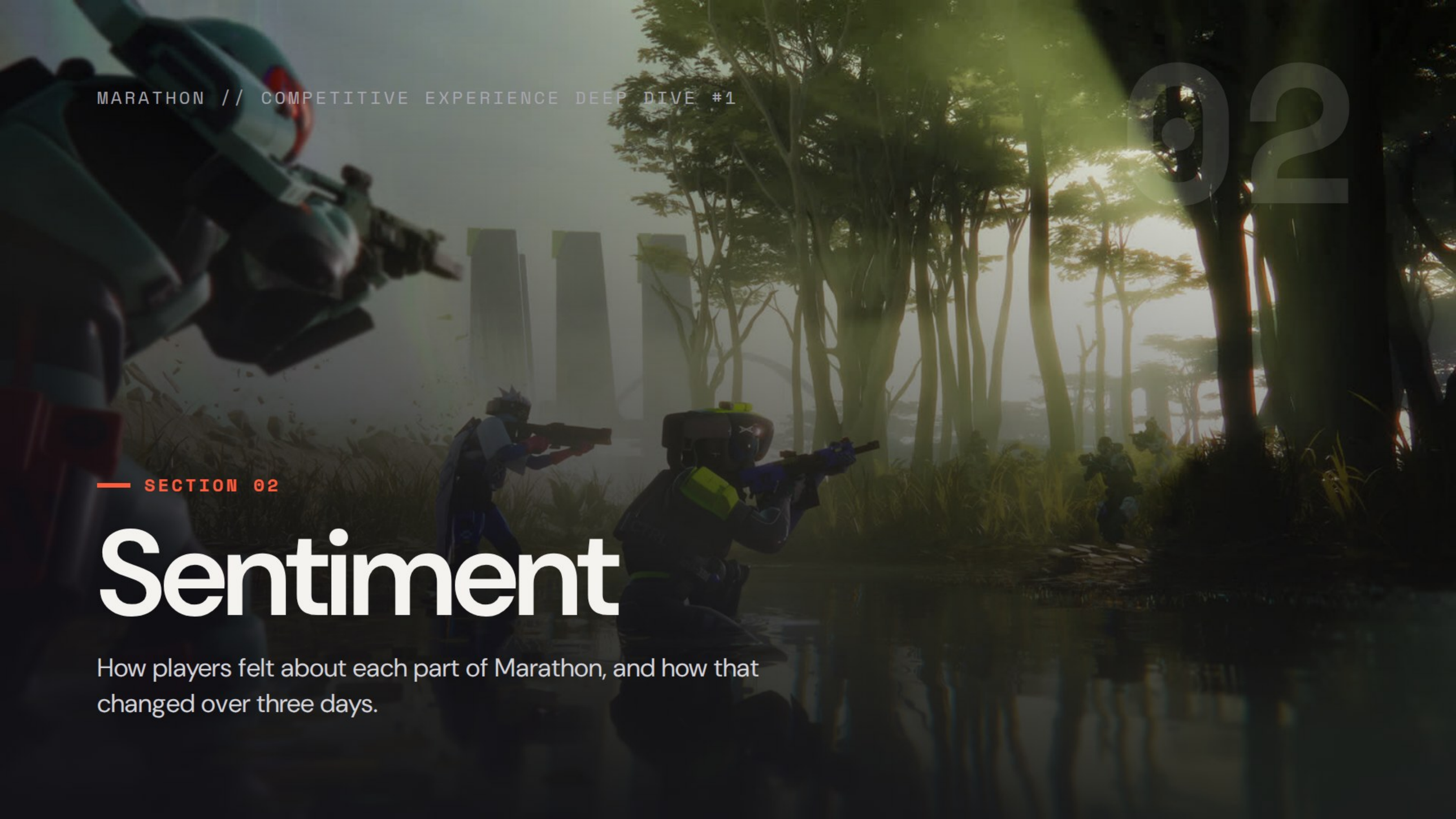
LOW

• PLAYERS

LOW

• PLAYERS

02



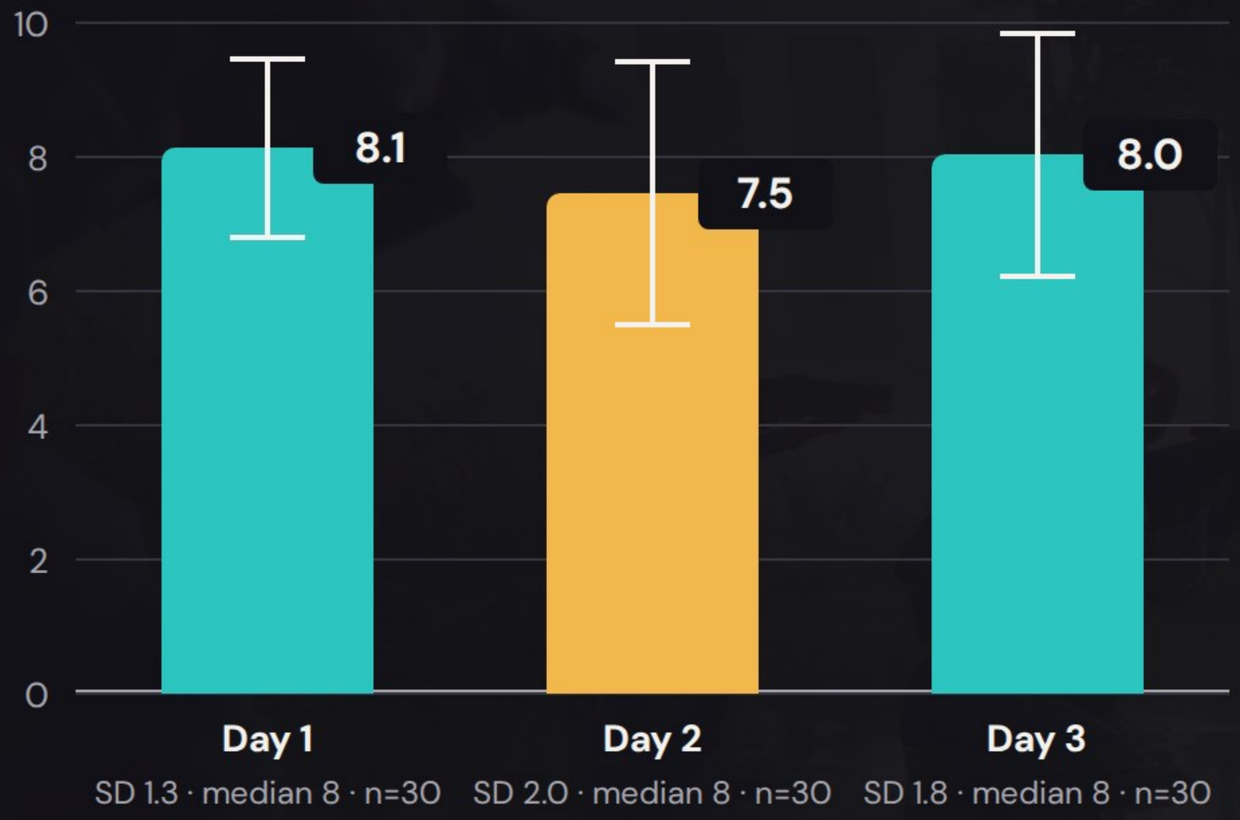
SECTION 02

# Sentiment

How players felt about each part of Marathon, and how that changed over three days.

RATINGS OVER THREE DAYS

# Typical ratings hold at 8; Day 2's dip comes from a minority




**Typical ratings held steady.** The median was 8 on every day.

**Day 2's dip is spread, not a shift.** 19 of 30 moved by a point or less; 8 dropped two or more, three of them sharply, such as Jayden from 8 to 1.

**Day 3 ends more polarised.** More players gave a 10 than on Day 1 (9 of 30, up from 6), but a few low scores keep the spread wide.

**Intent to continue is solid.** On Day 3, 22 of 30 still wanted to play.

Bars show the mean overall experience rating (1 to 10). Whiskers show ±1 standard deviation, the spread of individual ratings; they are not a test of whether days differ.


PREVIEW
Available in the Full Report



PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

PREVIEW

# Available in the Full Report

STATEMENT RATED, N=••

DAY •

DAY •

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

•• of ••

• of ••

• of ••

, DAY •

# Gunplay is the reason players stay

STATEMENT RATED, N=30

**“The guns felt good to use overall”**




- Guns, combat feel and feedback praised unprompted — 10 of 30
- PvP deaths felt too quick or unapproachable — 3 of 30
- Certain AI enemies still confusing on Day 3 — 8 of 30

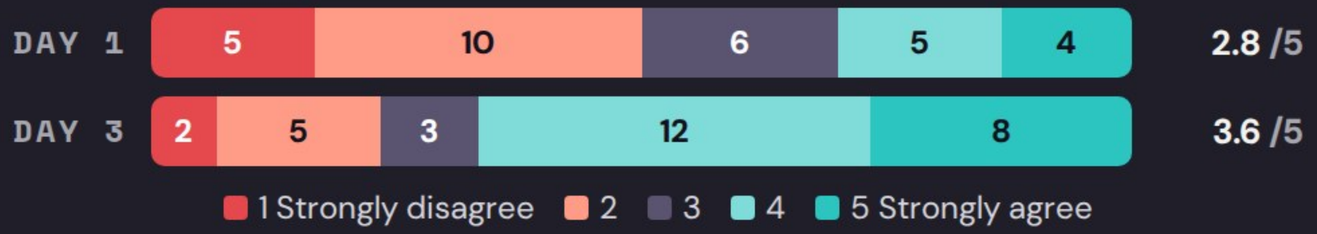
> I thought the gun play was fun. All the guns I used handled well and felt good to shoot.
>
> HEYWARD, DAY 1

> fighting against people felt really frustrating, anybody i encountered killed me right away
>
> SARA, DAY 1

# Auto-sell delights, item value confuses

STATEMENT RATED, N=30

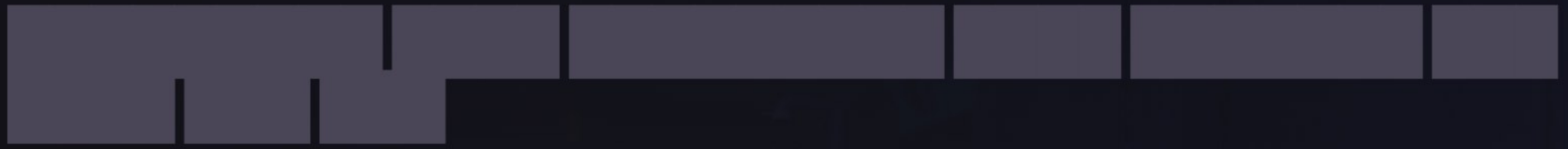
**“It was easy to understand what was worth taking and what was not”**




- Hard to tell what loot is worth or does — 14 of 30
- Auto-sell and the end-of-run summary praised — 7 of 30
- Lootable containers hard to spot — 3 of 30
- Always short of space — 3 of 30

> I appreciate the streamlined process of the game auto selling your treasures upon extracting. That’s a nice touch for sure.
>
> TAYLOR, DAY 1

> It was definitely hard to learn what loot is good and what loot did different things, everything kind of looked the same.
>
> JOSHUA, DAY 1



STATEMENT RATED, N=••

DAY •

DAY •

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

•• of ••

• of ••

• of ••

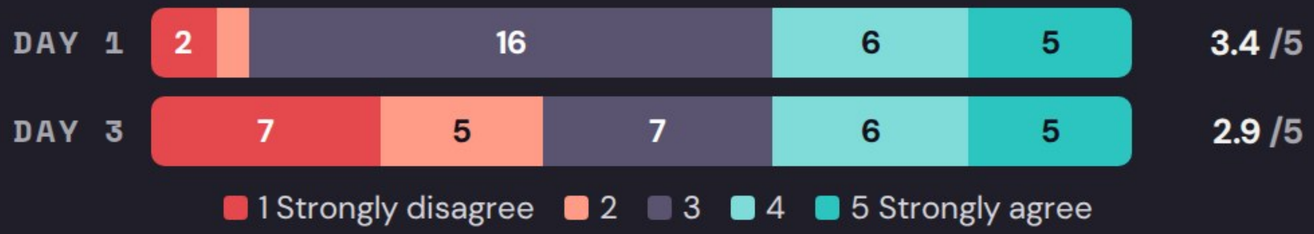
• of ••

, DAY •

# Few players engage with the Season Pass, and fewer would pay

STATEMENT RATED, N=30

**“It felt rewarding to unlock elements of the Season Pass”**




- Wouldn’t pay, or dislike paid passes in a paid game — 10 of 30
- Barely looked at it or couldn’t find it — 9 of 30
- Saw value or would buy — 6 of 30
- Unsure how SILK is earned — 3 of 30

> The season pass is a good value that offers an extra layer of progression for committed players.
>
> CORY, DAY 3

> I dont think its worth it at all. The cosmetics are kind of boring and their is no return on investment as far as premium currency.
>
> TAYLOR, DAY 3

WHAT PLAYERS LOVED

# Combat, the loop and the sense of getting better

"

10/10 Ill be playing this game either solo or with friends. I love the overall game loop and combat and there is a lot to the game I want to try out and experience still.

TAYLOR, DAY 3

"

I want to keep playing I've had more fun after each playtest, and I want to continue unlocking stuff.

HEYWARD, DAY 3

"

I really enjoyed the smooth and snappy movement, the variety of enemies and the FEEL of the guns was fantastic.

ZACHARY B, DAY 1

"

I'm motivated to learn more about the Marathon universe, shells/abilities, and various weapons in the game. It's time to fine tune my play style and my load out!

CORY, DAY 3

"

mainly I am motivated to get into fun pvp fights, I love the gunplay and abilities.

REVAN, DAY 3

"

My level of motivation of continuing to play the game is at a high peak specially since im getting better in the game.

JADE, DAY 3

PREVIEW

## Available in the Full Report

NEXT STEPS

# Three tests to take this further

01 ITERATIVE USABILITY

## Fix the first runs, then retest

Small rounds with fresh players on the first hours: objectives, contract state, loot value and heals.

02 LARGE-SCALE APPRECIATION

## Check which findings hold

A larger sample rating each area, to size loot, comms and Season Pass findings beyond 30 players.

03 MULTI-SESSION

## Rerun the three days

Repeat this study on the revised build to see whether the Day 2 dip and confusion close faster.



## Plan the road to launch

Map these tests into a roadmap tied to your milestones.

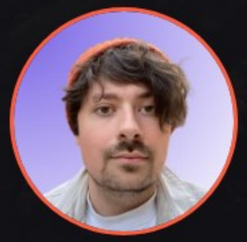
Build a roadmap

PlaytestCloud

GG

# THANK YOU

Questions, or want to dig into a clip together? We're happy to walk through it.




**Joe Kulik**

Senior Research and Accessibility Lead, PlaytestCloud





**Ugo Bui-Xuan**

Director of Research, PlaytestCloud


PLAYTESTCLOUD.COM // THE PLAYER INSIGHTS PLATFORM™